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ABSTRACT

METHOD OF OPERATING NETWORKED GAMING DEVICES

A method of controlling a plurality of gaming devices (2) for the payment of a mystery jackpot to one of networked gaming devices (2) is disclosed. The method includes the steps of randomly predetermining a jackpot number between minimum and maximum numbers (step 11), setting the minimum number as the commencement number upon commencement of a jackpot period, incrementing from the minimum number upon receipt of incrementing signals from each gaming device (step 14), frequency of the incrementing signals from each device (2) corresponding to the amount of play of that device (2), randomly selecting a winning one of the plurality of devices (2) from the devices (2) currently in play when the incrementing number equals the jackpot number (step 17), and awarding the jackpot to that device (step 18).

Fig. 2

METHOD OF OPERATING NETWORKED GAMING DEVICES

The present invention relates to gaming devices and, in particular, to a method of operating the gaming such that a jackpot is payable by the incremental use of the gaming devices in a network and when a predetermined random jackpot value is reached, a controller randomly
 5 selects one of the devices and awards a current jackpot to that device.

BACKGROUND TO THE INVENTION

Existing methods of operating networks of gaming devices such as poker or slot machines include so-called mystery jackpot systems. One well known form of a mystery jackpot uses a controller which randomly selects a winning number from a range of numbers when
 10 commencing a mystery jackpot. The machines connected into the mystery jackpot system provide signals to the controller which increment a counting means when each of the machines is played. The mystery jackpot is won by the machine which provides the last incrementing signal to the controller when the count number of the counting means equals the randomly selected winning number.

15 In practical working systems, the incrementing signal is provided by the machines not when every "game" is played but when the equivalent amount of the "coin" inserted in the machine is played. One type of these tokenised machines, is the machine which receives one dollar coins but every "game" is played with an amount of, for example, five cents. It may be the case that the person playing the machine plays more than one game every time they activate
 20 the play button, however it is valid to play the equivalent of five cents only when activating the play button.

In practical working systems the incrementing signal is provided to the controller which tokenises the credits. One way of explaining this is that the controller "increments" the signal received from a gaming machine only when the total number of credit signals provided
 25 to the controller by a particular machine exceeds the prescribed value, for example, one dollar. It may be the case that every person playing a gaming machine plays more than one game every time they activate the play button, however it is valid to play the equivalent of as little as one cent when activating the play button.

In current working systems this means that where a person playing a gaming machine for lesser amounts, say one cent, five cents or even twenty cents, the controller will not increment the signal as a jackpot increment and those signals are not eligible for the jackpot prize until the total amount played by that machine equals or exceeds one dollar. A player using a one dollar machine would on the other hand, have every play recorded as an incrementing signal eligible to win the jackpot amount.

OBJECT OF THE INVENTION

It is an object of the present invention to provide a method of operating a network of gaming devices such as networked poker machines and the like which substantially overcomes or ameliorates the above mentioned disadvantages. At the very least, the object of the invention is to provide an alternative to known methods and apparatus.

DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

According to one aspect of the present invention there is disclosed a method of controlling a plurality of gaming devices for the payment of a mystery jackpot to one of said networked gaming devices, said method including the steps of randomly predetermining a jackpot number between minimum and maximum numbers, setting the minimum number as the commencement number upon commencement of a jackpot period, incrementing from said minimum number upon receipt of incrementing signals from each gaming device, frequency of said incrementing signals from each said device corresponding to the amount of play of that said device; randomly selecting a winning one of said plurality of devices from said devices currently in play when the incrementing number equals said jackpot number, and awarding said jackpot to that said device.

In the preferred form, the jackpot corresponds to the jackpot number.

Preferably, the jackpot period is commenced randomly while in other preferred forms, the jackpot period is commenced periodically either on a time basis or is based on frequency of play of the devices.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The present invention will be now be described with reference to the accompanying drawing in which:

Fig. 1 is a block diagram of a network of gaming devices to which is operated according to the method of the present invention, and

Fig. 2 is a flow chart of the method of operation of the present invention.

BEST MODE OF CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

A network 1 of poker machines 2 or the like is illustrated in Fig. 1. Each of the poker machines 2 are electrically connected to a controller 3 via an interface card 4 or directly depending on the communications protocol or method. The poker machines 2 are adapted to send incrementing signals corresponding to the amount of its particular use to the controller 3 while the controller 3 is adapted to send incrementing signals to a display 5 to represent current jackpot value and to the poker machine 2 upon the winning of a jackpot to denote that the player of that machine 2 is the winner.

A flow chart of the operation of the network 1 is illustrated in Fig. 2. The jackpot period is commenced at start 10 and a jackpot value is a randomly selected number at step 12. This jackpot value is selected between minimum and maximum values which are preset or preselected by the controller 3 as seen in step 11. Upon operation of each machine 2, incrementing signals which correspond to the frequency of play of that machine 2 are sent to the controller 3 and a counter number as controlled by the controller 3 commencing at the minimum value is incremented (step 14) upon receipt of such incrementing signals in step 13.

This increment (step 14) is continued until the counter number equals the jackpot value as previously randomly selected as seen in step 13 which compares these values. When the values are equal, the controller 3 randomly selects a winning one of the poker machines 2

from the poker machines currently in play as seen in step 17 and awards the jackpot in step 18.

The decision as to whether a machine is currently in play (step 16) relates to the frequency of its use as well as if a player has inserted their user details thereto if appropriate.

- 5 Naturally, the parameters to decide whether a poker machine 2 is currently in play is decided by the operator of the network according to their requirements.

In the preferred embodiment the jackpot corresponds to the jackpot number.

- 10 Preferably, the jackpot period is commenced randomly while in other preferred forms, the jackpot period is commenced periodically either on a time basis or is based on frequency of play of the devices.

It is seen that this method of jackpot determination allows each player of the network 1 an equal opportunity to win the jackpot.

- 15 The foregoing describes only one embodiment of the present invention, and modifications obvious to those skilled in the art can be made thereto without departing from the scope of the present invention.

The claims defining the invention are as follows:

1. A method of controlling a plurality of gaming devices for the payment of a mystery jackpot to one of said networked gaming devices, said method including the steps of randomly predetermining a jackpot number between minimum and maximum numbers,
 5 setting the minimum number as the commencement number upon commencement of a jackpot period, incrementing from said minimum number upon receipt of incrementing signals from each gaming device, frequency of said incrementing signals from each said device corresponding to the amount of play of that said device, randomly selecting a winning one of said plurality of devices from said devices currently in play when the incrementing
 10 number equals said jackpot number, and awarding said jackpot to that said device.
2. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the jackpot corresponds to the jackpot number.
3. The method as claimed in claims 1 or 2, wherein the jackpot period is commenced randomly.
- 15 4. The method as claimed in claims 1 or 2, wherein the jackpot period is commenced periodically on a time basis.
5. The method as claimed in claims 1 or 2, wherein the jackpot period is commenced periodically on frequency of play of the devices.
6. The method as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein the a decision as
 20 to whether the devices are in play is based on frequency of its use.
7. The method as claimed in claim 6, wherein the the decision as to whether the devices are in play is further determined whether a player has inserted user details.

8. A method of controlling a plurality of gaming devices for the payment of a mystery jackpot to one of said networked gaming devices, said method being substantially as described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

DATED this SIXTEENTH day of AUGUST 1999
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Patent Attorneys for the Applicant
WILSON & YOUNG

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BLOCK DIAGRAM OF A NETWORK OF GAMING DEVICES OPERATED ACCORDING TO THE METHOD OF PRESENT INVENTION.

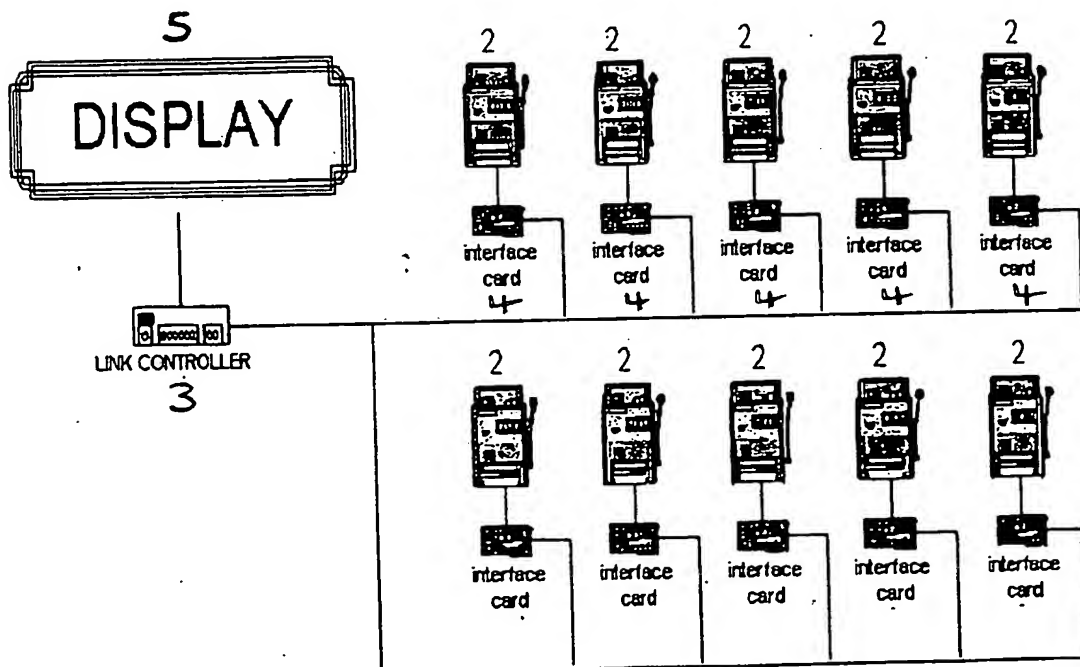


figure 1

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FLOW CHART OF THE METHOD OF OPERATION OF THE INVENTION

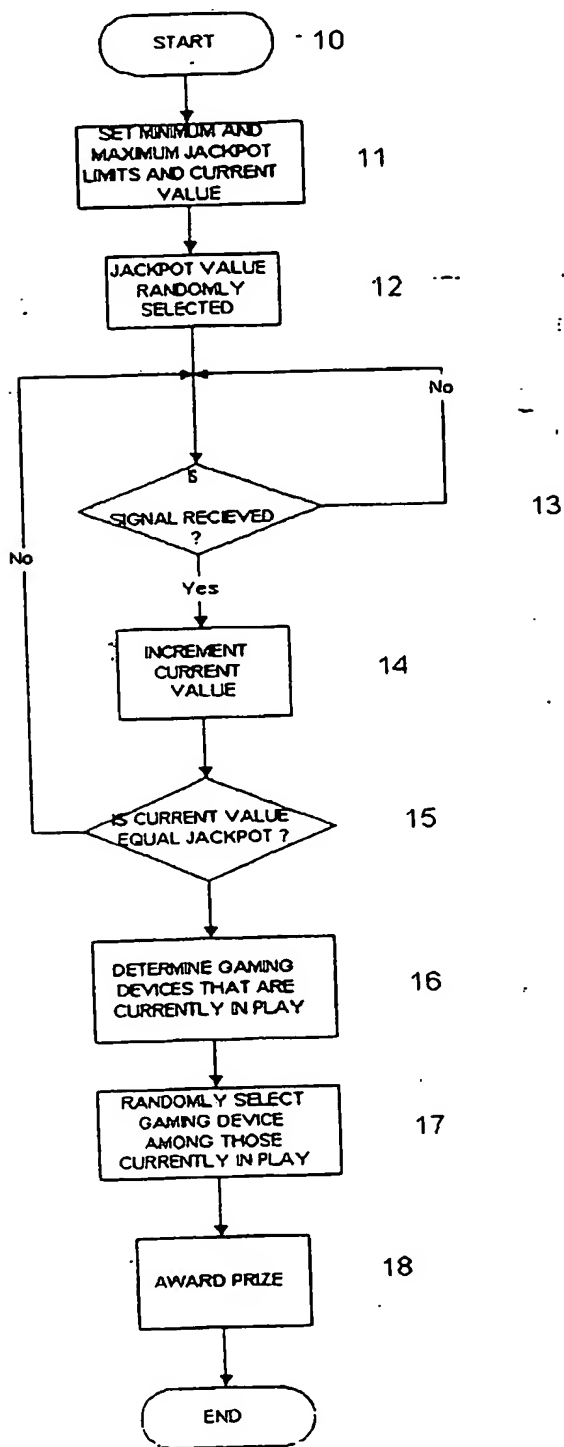


figure 2

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BLOCK DIAGRAM OF A NETWORK OF GAMING DEVICES OPERATED ACCORDING TO THE METHOD OF PRESENT INVENTION.

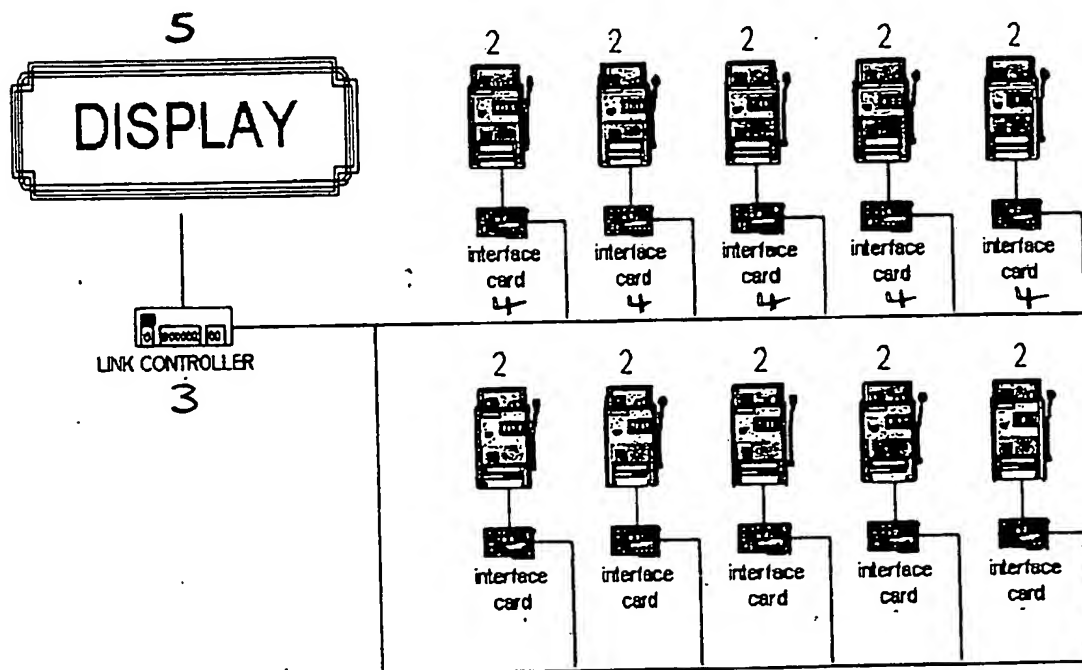


figure 1

The claims defining the invention are as follows:

1. A method of controlling a plurality of gaming devices for the payment of a mystery jackpot to one of said networked gaming devices, said method including the steps of randomly predetermining a jackpot number between minimum and maximum numbers,
 5 setting the minimum number as the commencement number upon commencement of a jackpot period, incrementing from said minimum number upon receipt of incrementing signals from each gaming device, frequency of said incrementing signals from each said device corresponding to the amount of play of that said device, randomly selecting a winning one of said plurality of devices from said devices currently in play when the incrementing
 10 number equals said jackpot number, and awarding said jackpot to that said device.
2. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the jackpot corresponds to the jackpot number.
3. The method as claimed in claims 1 or 2, wherein the jackpot period is commenced randomly.
- 15 4. The method as claimed in claims 1 or 2, wherein the jackpot period is commenced periodically on a time basis.
5. The method as claimed in claims 1 or 2, wherein the jackpot period is commenced periodically on frequency of play of the devices.
6. The method as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein the a decision as
 20 to whether the devices are in play is based on frequency of its use.
7. The method as claimed in claim 6, wherein the the decision as to whether the devices are in play is further determined whether a player has inserted user details.